

Bible Study Guide

PASTORATE

April 17, 2013

Lectionary Readings

Psalms 33; Jeremiah 32:36–41; Revelation 5:6–14; **John 21:1–14**

Background

Though John's Gospel appears to have concluded nicely with chapter 20, John adds one more story to serve as an epilogue for his book, providing balance to the prologue of 1:1–18. The resurrected Jesus has already appeared in John's Gospel on Easter Sunday and then eight days later; in chapter 21, he now appears a third and final time. Since the epilogue no longer serves the Gospel narrative's primary purpose (as mentioned in 20:30–31), it is only natural to suppose that John's desire is to highlight themes that will point the way forward for the church after the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. While it's evident that our passage of 21:1–14 sets the scene for the verbal exchange between Peter and Jesus in 21:15–23, this initial portion of the story can also stand alone and provide its own challenge for the life and witness of the church today.

John 21:1–14

¹ After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. ² Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. ³ Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

⁴ Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵ Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." ⁶ He said to them, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. ⁷ That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. ⁸ But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

⁹ When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." ¹¹ So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

Commentary

Before leaving everything to follow Jesus, Simon Peter was a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee. After encountering the resurrected Jesus, Peter decides—at least for one night—to return to his long-neglected work. Seven other disciples join him, some named and some not; they are all unsuccessful. As dawn breaks—a subtle reminder of resurrection morning (20:1)—an unidentified voice from the shore instructs them to throw their nets to the other side of the boat, at which point over a hundred fish are caught. At this point, the beloved disciple recognizes Jesus, and then Peter jumps into the water and swims ashore to meet him. In telling this story, John provides a number of significant details of the scene that are worth pondering.

- As the disciples come ashore, they notice a “charcoal fire.” The only other time this word is used in the New Testament is in John 18:18, immediately after Peter had denied Jesus three times.
- Jesus had already prepared fish and bread for them (reminiscent of 6:11 and the miraculous feeding of five thousand). He doesn’t need their catch, which he is responsible for, and yet he invites them to bring their fish.
- John makes a point to tell his readers that the fish were large, there were 153 of them, and the nets did not break (21:11).

Discussion Questions

1. What are some things that are unusual about this story?
2. Why do you think Peter goes fishing after the resurrection?
3. What do you think are some of the things Jesus is trying to teach his disciples?
4. When the disciples first encounter the risen Jesus in 20:19–23, he commissions them, breathes on them the Spirit, and sends them into the world. In what ways might these two scenes be related?
5. Why do you think the disciples wanted to ask Jesus who he was even though they knew he was Jesus?
6. What might Jesus have looked like if he was only partly recognizable, if his resurrected body was no longer subject to decay?
7. How does this story encourage you and your faith?

The Collect of the Day

O God, whose blessed Son made himself known to his disciples in the breaking of bread: Open the eyes of our faith, that we may behold him in all his redeeming work; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*